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MEMORANDUM FOR: Bob

Attached is the first draft of the material Casey asked me to pull together for him last week's rebutting arguments against aid to Third World insurgencies. OGI's [redacted] took the lead, although there was some input from DO and the NIC as well. Casey wanted something to take with him Friday so he has a copy of this first draft as well.

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Arguments Against US Support to Third World Insurgencies: Misconceptions and Rebuttals

During the unfolding public debate over whether or not the United States should commit itself to a program of modest support to the Nicaraguan guerrillas a number of arguments against support have surfaced. Many of these are based on misconception and misunderstanding. What follows is a listing of the six most common misconceptions, each followed by our rebuttal.

Misconception: US aid to insurgent groups will never match the massive support provided by the Soviets and therefore is money down the rat hole.

Rebuttal: External aid to an insurgency does not need to match that given to the government because counterinsurgency efforts are far more costly to implement and maintain. Some experts estimate that it can cost about 10 times more to counter an insurgency than to support one. The principal factors contributing to government disadvantage are:

- **Manpower ratios.** Insurgency experts commonly agree that the government must maintain a significant manpower advantage--in some cases as much as 10 to 1--over the insurgents in order to win the conflict. Recruiting, training and equipping an adequate security force becomes a monumental task in situations where the government faces a large insurgent force. For example, in Angola where the insurgents number 50,000-60,000, the beleaguered regime with only about 150,000 regular troops and militia maintains power through massive aid received from the Soviets and Soviet surrogates. In the last ten years, this support has included 36,000 Cuban troops, 1,200 Soviet advisors and $3 billion in military assistance.

- **Protecting the populace.** Because the government cannot choose the battlefield in an insurgency, it must provide security throughout the country. This task becomes exceedingly difficult in countries with large rural populations. Because extensive fortification networks--maintained by troops that patrol the countryside--are needed to provide such protection, large numbers of troops are tied down.

- **Protecting economic targets.** A country's economic infrastructure--transportation networks, electrical power systems, major industries--is comprised of a number of facilities and ancillary support structures that are difficult to secure. By their very nature, powerlines, oil pipelines, or railroads cannot be well

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guarded unless a government expends large numbers of troops. Additionally, a country's economy can possibly be crippled if the insurgents successfully sabotage a key economic target, such as an oil refinery.

- **Equipment Expenses.** Because effective counter-insurgency campaigns frequently use airpower--helicopter gunships or tranports--heavy weapons and tactical communications equipment, the cost of mounting such campaigns is quite expensive. Also, large quantities of ammunitions are needed when fighting an "invisible" enemy.

Conversely, an insurgency is far less costly to fund and results can be achieved inexpensively for the following reasons:

- **Manpower ratios.** The manpower ratios associated with an insurgency favor the insurgents: far fewer people are required to destabilize a government than are needed to protect it.

- **Absorptive capacity.** A relatively small, unsophisticated insurgent force will not require highly technological, expensive military equipment because it will not be able to effectively assimilate this equipment. At the same time, some of the funding provided to counter an insurgency may be wasted. Too much sophisticated equipment can overwhelm a fighting force and actually decrease its capabilities through wasted resources, ineffectual use of equipment and the subsequent lost opportunities.

- **Flexibility.** The insurgents can pick their opportunities to strike at the government and quickly retreat from government offensives. Many strategic targets are vulnerable and thus, great physical and psychological harm can be inflicted on the government at a relatively low cost.

- **Inexpensive programs.** Much of the insurgents' appeal to the populace comes from their efforts to improve living conditions within the country. Programs to provide education, improve sanitation and health facilities are cheaper to fund than programs to upgrade the military capabilities of the government.

- **Inexpensive equipment.** The military equipment needed by the insurgents is less sophisticated and therefore, less expensive than that needed by the government.

- **Incremental achievements.** Because insurgency is a protracted conflict, involves a number of stages and

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is pursued through a variety of tactics, progress is made through small, numerous achievements. A fullblown offensive is not required to gain momentum in the insurgency, for smallscale tactics can gradually erode the stability of the government.

Misconception: The insurgents must realize a military victory to overthrow the government and this is an unrealistic prospect in most of these countries.

Rebuttal: Most insurgent conflicts are not decided on the battlefield. The military aspect of an insurgency is only one part of the effort. Equally important to an insurgency's ultimate success is the political or "hearts and minds" component of the strategy. Many insurgencies have forced the collapse of regimes that, either through an erosion of popular support or international pressure, were already weakened without requiring a decisive military victory. In Uganda, for example, the recent success of Musaveni--who led a small resistance movement against a government force six times it size and succeeded without fighting a major engagement--shows the vulnerability of brutal, corrupt governments. In both Cuba and Nicaragua, the insurgents' victory was facilitated by the immense unpopularity of the dictatorial regimes. In the case of Algeria in the late 1950s and South Yemen in the 1960s, neither Paris nor London had the perseverance or domestic support to continue their counter-insurgency efforts and a stalemated situation ensued, resulting in eventual withdrawal by the foreign forces and victory for the insurgents. Moreover, international pressure was a key factor in bringing about the negotiations between the white regime and the insurgents in Rhodesia and ultimately led to a peaceful insurgent victory.

Misconception: Insurgents can win without external support so why provide it?

Rebuttal: In most successful insurgencies, external support plays an important role in two ways. During the initial stages, access to a foreign sanctuary is frequently critical for an insurgency's survival. As the insurgency gains visibility through military action, external material support and international recognition of the shadow government--or the withdrawal of international support for the regime--can be decisive factors. External support played a key role in the successful rise to power of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. Without massive support from the Cubans and Soviets, the Popular Movement would not have been able to defeat the other groups vying for power. Moreover, the Sandinistas' victory was achieved in large measure through Cuban assistance in the form of advice, training, arms and funds.

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The withdrawal of external support--as opposed to having never received foreign aid--can destroy or greatly diminish the insurgents' capabilities, at least initially. This occurred in:

- the Philippines, where the communist Chinese withdrew support from the Huks during 1946-1954.
- Venezuela, where Cuba, after becoming disillusioned with the insurgents in the mid-1960s, withdrew support.
- Greece, where Tito terminated support for the Greek insurgents and closed the Yugoslav borders in the late 1940s.
- Angola, where the US stopped its support of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola following the Clark Amendment in 1975 and the Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola gained power.

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Misconception: Because there is no great popular support for many of the insurgent groups, there is little chance of achieving success against the government, so why should we fund them?

Rebuttal: An analysis of historical cases of insurgency shows that among the key indicators of insurgent success are progressive withdrawal of domestic support for the government and gradual erosion of international support for the government. Because of the long-term nature of insurgent movements, evidence of these indicators is usually slow to mount and, in many cases, government actions to remedy social injustices and economic problems often will cause potential detractors to give the government the benefit of the doubt. Continued government abuses, however, eventually erode support for the regime as evidence of these injustices mounts and greater numbers of the populace become affected by them.

In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas' repressive tactics and unpopular policies have caused growing dissatisfaction among the populace. For example, the insurgents have reportedly made gains among rural peasants who resent agricultural collectivization and resettlement programs as well as the government's mandatory military draft and anti-church policies. The heavy financial burden of the counterinsurgency effort--about half of the Nicaraguan budget last year--combined with poor economic management has worsened the plight of many Nicaraguans and caused additional discontent with the Sandinista regime.

Until recently, the Sandinista regime has enjoyed a fair amount of support from Western nations--West Europeans viewed the revolution as a reaction to socioeconomic problems endemic to dictatorial regimes and Latin American nations saw it as a triumph over US political and economic dominance. Because the insurgency has been partly responsible for preventing the Sandinistas from a more rapid consolidation of power and complete suppression of the opposition, evidence of their tactics and abuses is mounting. As a result, many Western nations have become more critical of the Sandinistas and official West European and multilateral financial aid to Nicaragua has been decreasing in recent years.

- The West German press reported that Social Democratic Party Executive Committee member Hans-Juergen Wischnewski, why originally was a strong backer of the Sandinistas, criticized the proclamation of the state of emergency in Nicaragua.

- In a June 1985 press conference, Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez stated that he wished there were more civil rights in Nicaragua.

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- Some West European governments have privately expressed misgivings over the Sandinista-imposed suspension of liberties and lack of progress toward democratic pluralism in Nicaragua.

In Latin America, the perception that Latin American states are generally supportive of the Sandinista regime and do not approve of US involvement is largely false. The general rule with regard to Latin America appears to be that the closer the country is to Nicaragua, the greater the fear and dislike of the Sandinista regime becomes. This is especially true of the Central American countries, as evidenced by recent USIA public opinion surveys. These surveys, conducted between June and November 1985, found:

- Nicaragua is seen as a military threat by nine out of 10 in Costa Rica and Honduras and by about half in Guatemala. Moreover, the sense of threat has increased considerably since 1983.

- Sixty-percent of the people polled in these countries say that the United States interferes in Central America, but that the net result is good. Cuba, the USSR, and Nicaragua are together named as interfering more often than the United States with their interference being unanimously described as negative.

- Public opinions of Nicaragua, Cuba, and the USSR are overwhelmingly negative, with most regarding Nicaragua as a tool of Cuba and the USSR.

- A large percentage of those who responded in Costa Rica and Honduras approve of US aid to the Nicaraguan insurgents, with an approval rating of two to one in the other two countries.

- Central Americans generally regard the national elections in Nicaragua as dishonest.

Several Latin American political leaders have privately admitted that the Sandinista regime is a Marxist-Leninist one, but their countries cannot afford to antagonize it. In addition, Third World nations have a built-in aversion to openly attacking a fraternal government, particularly when it is increasingly powerful and threatening. As a result, many public statements of support for the Sandinista regime by other Latin American states must be largely discounted. Given this record of diminishing support for the Sandinista regime, it would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that the anti-Sandinista effort is having no effect.

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Misconception: The small size of these guerilla forces and the limited aid provided to these groups pose little threat to the government so our aid will have little impact.

Rebuttal: The Sandinistas remain intent on ultimately consolidating a totalitarian Marxist-Leninist state, and undoubtedly see the insurgency as a major obstacle. They probably believe that without a viable insurgency, the political opposition would present little challenge to them. The longer the insurgency can continue to stave off complete consolidation, the more opportunity there will be to take advantage of Sandinista mistakes and unpopularity. Moreover, the insurgents, whether at this time a popular representative of the opposition or not, at least provide an alternative to those dissatisfied with Sandinista rule.

The opposition's ability to have survived recently without major US aid is an indication of the growing dissatisfaction with the Sandinista regime's policies. A major influx of funding would not be decisive in achieving the overthrow of the regime in the near term because a military victory is not attainable at present because of the difference in force size and capability between insurgents and the government. Limited aid, however, would enable the political opposition to continue and signal to Moscow and Cuba that their activities in Nicaragua will not go unopposed.

Analysis of Third World Marxist regimes reveals a strong tendency to move quickly to consolidate power to thwart internal opposition and to develop close ties with the Soviet bloc to discourage external intervention. These regimes, however, sometimes adopt a facade of pluralism and independence in the early years in an effort to gain international legitimacy and support. Where unimpeded--no viable internal opposition to resist the regime and no threat from the United States or other Western power--consolidation and Soviet-bloc alignment can occur quickly:

- Castro, for example was able to eliminate virtually all internal opposition in Cuba within the first two years, and soon was relying primarily on the Soviets for economic and military assistance.

- Within two and a half years of Selassie's overthrow in Ethiopia, Mengistu had consolidated power, severed relations with the United States, and begun receiving Soviet military support--which grew dramatically following the expulsion of Soviet officials from Somalia a few months later.

On the other hand, where the United States has retained a presence and provided support to opposition forces--such as in Nicaragua--consolidation of the Marxist regime has been much

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slower. After almost seven years in power, the Sandinistas--faced with a continuing insurgency--have not been able to complete the consolidation process and eliminate the internal political opposition. In addition, both the Soviets and Cubans are cautious about provoking a confrontation with the United States over Nicaragua. Unlike the Angola and Ethiopia cases, the USSR has not signed a friendship treaty or made other formal commitments to Nicaragua, and the Cubans have refrained from sending in large numbers of combat troops.

During the last year, the Sandinista government has continued efforts to suppress the opposition. In October, it decreed an expanded state of emergency to increase government powers and to restrict the activities of political, labor, and business leaders, as well as to resume heavy press censorship and reduce the influence of the Church. While these restrictions have hampered opposition activity, they have not eliminated it:

- Despite an intense campaign to discredit and undermine the influence of the Catholic Church (including spreading disinformation, harassing leaders, and closing the Church radio and newspaper), Cardinal Obando y Bravo remains the most effective opposition voice, and the Church retains strong support among Nicaraguans. Catholic bishops have also resisted Sandinista efforts to compromise Church autonomy and impose Marxism in the schools.

- Although Coordinadora--an opposition coalition of political parties, business and labor organizations--has been reluctant to defy the regime's restrictions, several of the parties are independently continuing their local organizing activities, and businessmen have held a series of local meetings to discuss government economic policies.

Misconception: The United States should not support insurgencies because countries should decide their own future.

Rebuttal: US policy in support of insurgent movements fighting Marxist-Leninist regimes is directed at countering greater Soviet military involvement in the Third World. The Soviet approach in recent years has been a high-cost, long-term effort to maintain Marxist-Leninist parties in power and prevent opposition groups from taking control. The Soviets look to exploit low-risk opportunities to expand their position vis a vis the United States and are careful to avoid war with Washington. Moscow and Havana currently support governments in Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Nicaragua. In each case, however, the Soviets now find themselves supporting a Marxist-Leninist government that is combatting an insurgency--a clear reversal of the roles experienced by the United States and the Communists in

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Vietnam. These insurgent movements reflect efforts by groups in these countries to determine their own future and not have it decided by Moscow.

Given the nature of insurgent conflicts, the cost to Moscow and its Allies of countering an insurgency is considerably greater than the cost to the West of aiding the insurgents. Yet, at present, Moscow appears committed to holding these gains and is likely to exploit any low cost opportunities to further consolidate power. Part of this resolve may reflect Soviet belief that America's post-Vietnam reluctance to become embroiled in Third World conflicts will eventually force the United States to withdraw because the results of any US commitment are not immediate enough to sustain public support. The United States, however, can cause considerable problems for the Soviets by maintaining relatively low levels of support to insurgent groups. In El Salvador, for example, a low-level US commitment in support of the government has been a major factor in reversing the fortunes of Nicaraguan and Cuban-backed insurgents. By having to counter several insurgencies, the risks and costs of opportunities to Moscow for exploitation are increased substantially, alternatives to Soviet domination are kept alive in several Third World arenas, and Marxist-Leninist regimes in countries such as Nicaragua are prevented from quickly consolidating their revolution.

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As the above makes fairly clear, many of the arguments against US aid to insurgent forces seems to be based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of insurgency. Insurgency is a protracted political-military activity directed toward completely or partially controlling the resources of a country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations. Insurgent activity--including guerrilla warfare and political mobilization in the form of propaganda, recruitment, front organization, and international activity--is designed to weaken government control and legitimacy while increasing insurgent control and legitimacy.

Most insurgencies begin as small clandestine groups--less than 100 people--that must build an organization, recruit and train people, acquire supplies, and broadcast beliefs and goals. Insurgent prospects will depend upon their ability to exploit popular grievances. If a government fails to successfully counter the root causes of the rebellion, grievances will deepen and the insurgency will gain momentum. Consequently, an initially small insurgent group can grow into a formidable opponent. Before ultimately achieving victory, for example, Fidel Castro began his insurgent movement with only 15-20 combatants against an army of 40,000.

Fighting an insurgency is a long-term commitment. In almost no case of a successful post-World War II insurgency has the process been a rapid one. The rebels frequently struggle for a number of years before achieving their ultimate objective. For example, in Algeria, the insurgency begun against the French in 1954 did not culminate until 1962. Similarly, the roots of the Rhodesian insurgency can be traced to 1964, but the conflict did not conclude until 1980. In Angola, the insurgent movement that began in earnest in the early 1960s did not force the withdrawal of the Portuguese until 1974 and the conflict continues today against a Soviet-supported Marxist regime. The current Sandinista regime in power in Nicaragua struggled for 18 years before rising to power in 1979.

Most successful insurgencies exhibit common characteristics, among which are:

- o An ability to organize cadres without significant government interference, frequently due to the availability of foreign sanctuary. (Cuba, Rhodesia, Nicaragua, Vietnam)

- o Government failure to eliminate grievances on which insurgent support is based. (Algeria, Vietnam, Cuba)

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- o Government failure to include political moderates in power sharing. (South Yemen, Yugoslavia, Nicaragua)

- o Competent or charismatic leadership. (Cuba, Vietnam, China, Yugoslavia)

- o Government failure to adopt unconventional, small-unit tactics to fight the insurgency. (Cuba, Vietnam, Yugoslavia)

- o Attainment of external support for the insurgency--especially during the later stages. (Vietnam, South Yemen, Rhodesia)

The hit-and-run tactics of guerrilla warfare combined with small unit structures, allow insurgents to engage and tie-up extensive government resources. The incumbent regime is forced to defend its infrastructure, territory, and population from attacks that can occur virtually anywhere. This demands a major commitment of troops engaged in a defensive posture, as well as troops to mount aggressive counterinsurgency operations. The insurgents, on the other hand, not only are able to employ an economy of force but, as a result, do not need to maintain an extensive defensive apparatus. Additionally, the insurgents frequently are able to inflict considerable economic damage on the government without themselves having an economic sector to defend.

Military activities, however, only constitute one portion of a successful insurgency's struggle. Equally important is the political or "hearts and minds" component of an insurgency's strategy. Over time, as the insurgents champion popular concerns and the government fails to redress these grievances, the insurgency will gain momentum. In large measure, many successful insurgencies since 1945 have forced the collapse of regimes that, either through an erosion of popular support or international pressure, were already weakened and hence a decisive military victory became unnecessary. One of the most striking examples occurred recently in Uganda; rebel leader Musaveni led a relatively small movement against a government force six times its size and triumphed without fighting a major engagement. In Cuba, a small number of insurgents triumphed, in large measure, because of the immense unpopularity of the Batista regime.

External support invariably plays a key role in successful insurgencies. Safehaven preserves in contiguous countries allow insurgents a more or less inviolable staging area. Similarly, foreign financial, material, and propaganda support not only has a positive impact on insurgent morale, but contributes a mantle of legitimacy to the rebels' cause. Moreover, even token aid initially can sustain a small guerrilla unit that serves as a catalyst for those opposed to the government. Such external assistance contributed heavily to the Sandinistas' ultimate

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victory over Somoza. Even the American Revolution probably would not have succeeded without assistance from the French.

Alternatively, the withdrawal of external support to an insurgency can have a devastating effect; for example, Havana's cessation of aid to the Venezuelan insurgents in the mid-1960s proved fatal to that rebellion. Similarly, Yugoslav and Soviet withdrawal of aid from the Greek communist movement proved a death blow to that insurgency.

Additionally, there are other significant factors that contribute to insurgent defeat:

- Successful government civic action to redress popular grievances. (Malaysia, Guatemala)
- Power-sharing with moderate opposition parties. (El Salvador, Venezuela, Malaysia)
- Successful use of small-unit, unconventional tactics. (Oman, the Philippines, Malaysia)
- Insurgent failure or inability to operate in both urban and rural environments and spread its appeal. (Uruguay, Argentina, Venezuela)

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